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Sugarcane Beetles on Corn

Sugarcane beetles are capable of completely destroying a stand of corn, though they are not normally that serious. The adult beetle is black, robust, and about ½ inch long. It burrows down adjacent to the side of the corn seedling and eats the stalk just above the base of the roots. It leaves a very distinctive rough, dirty gouge where it has fed. This pest may cut out the bud, the base of the leaves, or even cut off the entire stalk.

These beetles prefer old sod in low, poorly drained fields. Eggs are laid in the fields in early summer. The grubs that emerge feed on dead and decaying vegetable matter. Adults emerge about two months later, following larval maturity and pupation. They feed on wild grasses in pasture areas. These insects overwinter in the adult stage and emerge at about the time that corn begins emerging in the spring. If food is available, the beetles stay. If not, they will fly in search of food. Corn, sugarcane, and rice are the only crops that are injured.

Since the greatest damage to corn is to the bud, and since the bud is generally beyond the reach of the beetles by the time that it is three feet high, corn should be planted early, using good seed and proper fertilization. Corn should never be planted directly after sod.

There are no insecticides available that are effective for control of sugarcane beetles.



An adult sugarcane beetle.
Photo: Clemson University CE 1703C.

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EIS/AG-3 (New 03/1999).